Kano Model of Customer Satisfaction

The Kano model explains why some product features please customers a lot while others barely matter. It was developed by Noriaki Kano, a Japanese researcher of quality, and published with colleagues in 1984. The key idea is that features affect satisfaction in different ways, so they should not all be treated alike. Teams use the model to decide where to spend limited time and money. Yasmin, who manages a small hotel, wants to improve guest satisfaction with it.

1. Basic Features

Basic features, also called must-be features, are the things customers simply expect. When they are present, nobody notices them, but when they are missing, customers become very unhappy. Having them gives no extra delight, because they are only the entry ticket. Examples are a working lock on a hotel door or a phone that makes calls. The first job is to get these right.

Example: A diner expects a clean table. Treating cleanliness as a basic feature, the restaurant checks every table, since nobody praises a clean table but everyone complains about a dirty one.

At work: Yasmin knows that guests expect a clean room and hot water. Treating these as basic features, she adds a daily checklist, because one missing item can ruin a stay.

2. Performance Features

Performance features, also called one-dimensional features, work in a simple way: the better they are, the happier customers become. Faster service, lower prices and longer battery life are typical examples. Customers can compare them easily, so they often shape decisions. Improving them brings steady gains, but competitors can copy the improvements. Teams decide how much better is worth the cost.

Example: A customer compares two phones, and the one with longer battery life wins. Seeing battery life as a performance feature, the maker improves it step by step, and each improvement increases satisfaction.

At work: Yasmin's guests often mention the speed of the Wi-Fi. Treating it as a performance feature, she upgrades the connection, and the guest reviews improve in step.

3. Delight Features

Delight features, also called attractive features, are pleasant surprises that customers did not expect. When they are missing, nobody complains, but when they are present, customers feel

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real delight. They can create stories that people share with others. Over time, a delight feature often becomes normal, and then customers start to expect it. So teams keep looking for new ways to surprise.

Example: A bakery adds a small free cookie to every order. Using it as a delight feature, the owner sees that customers smile and talk about it, although nobody asked for it.

At work: Yasmin leaves a handwritten welcome note and a local sweet in each room. Using it as a delight feature, she turns an ordinary stay into a memory, and several guests mention it in their reviews.

4. Find Them with a Survey

To classify features, the Kano method asks two questions about each feature. One asks how the customer would feel if the feature were present, and the other how they would feel if it were absent. The answers are combined in a simple table to show the category. Features that customers do not care about are called indifferent, and they should not get priority. Surveys should be repeated, because categories change over time.

Example: A phone maker asks a group of users two questions about a new voice feature: how would they feel if it were present, and how if it were absent. Using the Kano survey, the maker sees that most users would not care either way, so the feature is indifferent.

At work: Yasmin surveys fifty guests about a new gym. Using the Kano survey, she finds that most are indifferent, so she spends the budget on faster Wi-Fi instead.

Conclusion

In summary, the Kano model sorts features mainly into basic, performance and delight, while some features are indifferent. Basic features must be right, performance features reward improvement and delight features create memorable surprises. Noriaki Kano and colleagues published the idea in 1984. A short survey with two questions per feature shows where each one belongs, and the answers change over time. Yasmin's hotel now fixes basics first, then improves speed and adds small surprises.

Sources

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